The Corps
of
Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers

RCEME
in the
Royal Canadian School of Artillery (Anti-aircraft)
in the 1950s

The RCEME Heritage Archives

RCEME in the Royal Canadian School of Artillery (AA)

> Editor's Note: this essay describes the operation of the Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in supporting the Royal Canadian School of Artillery (Anti-aircraft), probably during the 1950s. The original author is unknown. The original document is in the RCEME Archives in CFB Borden. Abbreviations have been eliminated and explanations inserted in [] for a modern reader. The RCSA (AA) in Picton, Ontario, closed in 1960.

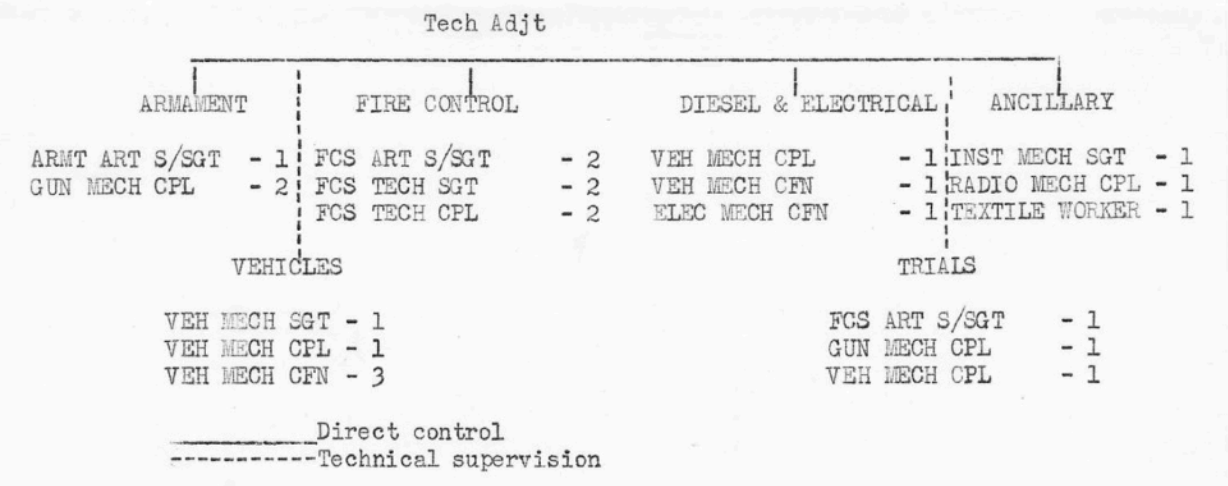
The growing pains of the RCEME Corps were possibly never more evident than to those personnel who have served in this artillery school, where the advent of our [artillery] tradesmen with Phase II RCEME tradesmen proved a difficult task for both Corps. There still remains some spade work before the saying "RCEME bottleneck" is forgotten. [Phase II RCEME was the rationalization of trades in the Canadian Army in the 1950s. Each technical trade was assigned to a Corps and all soldiers qualified in those trades were then transferred to that Corps. This resulted, for example in artillery weapons technicians being transferred to RCEME - ed]

The maintenance of our aim - to assist other arms and services to train for war by maintaining their equipment in serviceable condition - should answer our critics.

Many units in the army, whose requirements are not sufficient to entitle them to a Light Aid Detachment (LAD), have a number of RCEME personnel on their establishment. Their role is to carry out unit repairs to equipment which would otherwise have to be backloaded. These statements apply to a greater extent in this school than in any other unit in the army as a whole. The number of tradesmen is equivalent to that of a LAD. However, because it has not been designated a LAD, the operation is in many respects much smoother and more flexible.

For the sake of efficiency, the commandant of the school has seen fit to amalgamate all the RCEME tradesmen, with the exception of the vehicle mechanics responsible for vehicle maintenance, under one head. To these are added the Royal Canadian corps of Signals radio mechanics and a civilian textile worker to round out a comprehensive unit repair workshop. The Technical Adjutant, who in this instance is a RCEME captain, is responsible for all RCEME functions and personnel in the school, and is head of the workshop from a technical standpoint. Administration details are handled by the Armament Wing (Technical Stores and Maintenance Sections) of the School.

A breakdown of the maintenance and repair personnel in the school is as follows:



Procedures used in the unit workshop are based on those of a static workshop. However, paperwork is kept to an absolute minimum and is by-passed completely on many occasions. The greater percentage of the daily tasks are performed on site with each of the radar mechanics (fire control system technicians) being assigned to a set, and as such is in control of a maintenance van or his own private workshop complete with power, tools, and spares. The diesel mechanics are continually on the prowl watching over the many generators that are constantly in use. The gun mechanics find their services much in demand during range practices and, during the *cease fire* periods, perform a multitude of other jobs between maintenance and repair programs. This leaves only the ancillary section in the shop for a good part of the time.

The quiet periods are anything but, as far as the shop is concerned, for it is then that the extraneous repair jobs, necessary to the operation of a school, are completed. These run as high as fifty a month and encompass such equipment as washing machines, floor polishers, vacuum cleaners, office machinery, andregimentally owned television sets and radios.

The flexibility of some of the present crop of tradesmen can best be explained by the citing of the following examples:

> Any fire control system technician may be given the job of repairing a piece of wireless or line equipment. The unit repair of this equipment is normally carried out by one radio mechanic (RCCS) who is also part of the unit workshop.
>
> Gun mechanics may be found repairing small arms and occasionally television sets. (They can handle soldering irons as well as spanners).
>
> Our instrument mechanics spend considerable time repairing radar cables as well as carrying out the functions of workshop control and spare parts NCO.

Many interesting trials are carried out at the school in connection with the guns and radar equipment. RCEME mechanics are directly involved in practically all such trials. Resulting from these trials and day to day experience, many modifications to existing

equipments have been originated by this section and approved and promulgated by the Directorate of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering.

In addition to the normal vehicle repairs and generator repairs the vehicle mechanics become involved in repairs to radio controlled airplane targets along with the radio mechanics. Even a touch of marine repair is added by the presence of the “Recovery”, a 25-foot motor launch with a Chrysler Marine engine, used to recover drogues and the radio controlled targets on the anti-aircraft range over Lake Ontario.

Nor is training neglected. Trades training is carried out throughout the year under the direction of the Technical Adjutant with all artificers and Group 3 tradesmen sharing instructional duties. The percentage of upgradings is very high. On the regimental side, Junior NCO courses run by the RCSA (AA) usually have one or two RCEME candidates who invariably are to be found at or near the top of their class at the termination of the course.

Together with the two garrison RCEME units (210 Workshop, RCEME, and the LAD of 1 Light Anti-aircraft Regiment, RCA) the sizeable RCEME components are very active in camp affairs. In the field of sports a friendly rivalry is very evident between the Corps, with the younger Corps refusing to take a back seat. On the garrison baseball and bowling trophies the initials RCEME are much in evidence.

One of the social events of the year is the garrison RCEME birthday dance. Normally preceding the artillery ball by some two weeks, it is a must for large numbers of the gunners as well as all RCEME personnel and their friends. The guest list covers a wide area and is well answered in spite of conflicting parties elsewhere.

Nor are the activities confined to camp. Tradesmen are known to be liberal with their talents and Picton is no exception. Mechanics and technicians alike are to be found working with the local business men to add to their income and knowledge.

Service clubs as well as church organizations benefit from the presence of the “troops on the hill”. Many have been and will be sorely missed when RCEME Pers [the NDHQ posting directorate] passes down their marching orders.

And so the RCEME Corps is maturing and no little credit is due to the few - not enough to form an LAD - who perform their daily labours shoulder to shoulder with the RCA and other Corps.